

Our Pursuit of Holy Hope

By Jay Wegter

This article is adapted from *Possessed by God*, by David Peterson (pp. 69-92) ⁱ

I. We are to pursue holiness as a lifestyle (1 Pet 1:16).

A. *“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable, and perfect.”*

Romans 12:1-2 provides an excellent summary of the pursuit of holiness as a lifestyle—namely giving ourselves back to God who has taken us as His possession. In these two verses we are able to see the relationship between the accomplished action of God in His sovereign mercy, the *indicative* and the command of God, the *imperative*. The *indicative* is the grace truth that every true believer is the object of God’s eternal mercies in Christ. This is Paul’s summary of what it means to live as Christ’s disciple.

B. *The imperative concerns the ethical responsibilities that flow from the indicative.*

In this text the *imperative* is the responsibility of the believer to “present his or her body to God,” “and, to not be conformed to this world,” but, “be transformed” by the action of God’s Word. Transformation is by *renewal of the mind*—in the literal Greek, *metamorphosis*. The benefits and blessings of obedience found in these verses are encapsulated in the closing sentence: the obedient child of God will *prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect*. Simply put, God’s grace is full and free to believing sinners; but with His grace comes the status that we are sons of God. The obligation to live as His obedient children is the *imperative* described above.

II. We are to be *pre-occupied* with the end goal of holiness. The study of what happens at the end is known as ‘eschatology’.

A. The eschatological feature of sanctification is that the end goal of holiness, Christ-likeness at His return, is moving closer to us!

A careful reading of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 and 1 John 2:28-3:3 reveals that the eschatological feature of sanctification provides certain incentives and motivations for devotion to Christ. The promptings which flow from the eschatological feature of sanctification are as follows:

- A desire to be clothed with our resurrection body (2 Cor 5:2)
- A desire to be fully prepared to live with God (2 Cor 5:5)
- A desire to be at home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8)
- A desire to be pleasing to the Lord (2 Cor 5:9)
- A desire for a favorable judgment (2 Cor 5:9)
- A desire to greet the Lord with shameless confidence (1 Jn 2:28)
- A desire to be made like Christ in purity and glory when He returns (1 Jn 3:2-3)

As you look over the bulleted list above, you may be thinking, “Yes, I desire these wonderful promises, but I am not entirely sure that they are mine.” Assurance that these promises indeed belong to you is what the Scriptures describe as ‘hope’ (Rom 8:18-25). The gospel is filled with the message of God’s purposes for His people. Your hope will be deepened as you gain reassurance by feeding your faith upon God’s loving purposes for you. The intensity of your hope is the ‘barometer’ of your spiritual health (Heb 6:10-12). God’s loving purposes are found in the gospel promises which are intended to animate and to feed our hope (Col 1:27).

B. God’s end goal for His people and for creation is not a benevolent ‘wish’—it is the guaranteed future of the church and the universe (Rom 8:29-30).

God’s goal is the coming Kingdom of God. Christ’s resurrection is the warranty of our new bodies and of a new cosmos.ⁱⁱ The people of God will be like Christ in holiness. God will be everything to everyone in the

Kingdom. We will experience unbroken bliss while enjoying true community in a restored paradise. God's love will be ordering all things.ⁱⁱⁱ

Does this sound too fantastic—too unbelievable? If so, we need to meditate more upon the Person of Christ and the gospel; for the promise is that the 'word of His grace' is able to build us up and give us the inheritance among those who are sanctified (Acts 20:32). Our daily task is to find joy in the gospel, and to identify ourselves as God does—as those having a status in Christ of *holiness, favor, right-standing, acceptance, and sonship*. We run the race with endurance by looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb 12:1-2ff.). How we need to spend more time contemplating what we are *saved unto*, and not solely what we are *saved from*.^{iv}

1. What has to happen in our lives for God's end goal to become our end goal? The answer is to cultivate hope by focusing upon God's loving purposes for us so that these purposes regularly fill our meditation. This is mind renewal. True believers are called by God to a life of hope which continually informs our affections (Eph 4:4). We are commanded to hope, "*fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*" (1 Pet 1:13).
2. This hope has a sanctifying effect upon our lives by consolidating our yearnings and centering them in the Lord Himself. For the true believer is described as, "*looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus*" (Titus 2:13). Gospel hope guards the mind of the believer amidst a host of worldly distractions (1 Thess 5:7-10).
3. When this hope is yours there is a longing for that end goal of life with the Lord. This hope is the opposite of a vague or general hope of heaven. Biblical hope has a precise and specific content which is intended to stir and satisfy the soul. It is the *hope of glory* with everything that promised glory entails—from freedom from the presence of sin, to the final installment of our adoption in Christ (Col 1:27; Rom 8:23).
4. How do you know if you have a lively hope? The answer is that God's end goal will have become your end goal—His cause has become your

cause. Only then will you regard all other goals as lesser goals. And only then will you take the steps necessary to reach that end goal. Our goals and values will be increasingly conformed to the goal which God Himself has—the goal of conformity to Christ.^v Have you ‘booted up’ your imagination in the service of fortifying your hope? Do you regularly call to mind the infinite joy of being plunged into the shoreless sea of God’s love (Eph 3:18-19)?

C. *Living by faith, and as a person “called of God” produces a different quality of life, a different character, and a different value system (Heb 11:13-16; 24-27; 1 Thess 4:3-7; 1 Pet 1:15-16).* Let’s consider why living as an individual called by God produces resoluteness in striving toward the goal of Christ-likeness (1 Cor 1:2).

1. First of all, that to which we are called radically conditions how we live. God’s calling on us as believers in Christ defines us, identifies our Master, our purpose, our values, our mission, our priorities, our battle, and our ultimate goal. Believers are called to God as their true home and destiny.^{vi}
2. Secondly, Christ-likeness is the “finish line,” the end goal of our sanctification. God has called us and set us apart as His eternal possession. Each of these values is antithetical to the world’s temporal values. “According to Hebrews 11, faith gives us a different value system, with different priorities, leading to a profoundly different lifestyle.”^{vii}
3. This preoccupation with the ‘finish line’ is to fill the believer’s affections. Our hope of the future, characterized by Christ’s unending presence in glory, is designed to produce intense satisfaction as well as purpose and resolve. The specific content of this animating hope is the very opposite of vague concepts of the future. A specific understanding of the believer’s hope is necessary if we are to take the steps necessary to reach the goal God has for us His people. Christ, our Champion so fully focused on the joy set before Him, “He endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). Discuss why holding to a probability of heaven is not the same as biblical hope.

4. Have we ever plumbed the depths of what it means to be made like God in holiness? This promise found in Hebrews 12:10 is beyond our capacity to fathom completely; for God is promising that His loving purposes for us include being made like Christ in holiness (Rom 8:29). This is the only way God can make us eternally happy and blissful—that is to be made like our Lord in holiness (2 Thess 2:13-14).

III. The Father's faithful discipline of us keeps our progress in holiness on track.

A. Submission to the Father's discipline is inseparable from our progress in sanctification.

In Hebrews 12, God tells us precisely how He wants us to respond to His discipline (Heb 12:3-9). The believer must respond to God's discipline with a compliant spirit of resignation and trust. We must avoid carelessness and we must brace ourselves for conflict and trial—respecting our Heavenly Father. We are to continue to esteem highly our infinite spiritual blessings in Christ. We must remember that God is disciplining us so that we might share His holiness (Heb 12:10).^{viii}

B. The author of the book of Hebrews is utterly realistic—discipline is painful to our flesh.

But the promise is that the Father is absolutely trustworthy, and that the discipline will produce the precise training we need for spiritual peace and for the fruit-bearing of progressive sanctification. The promised outcome of submission to His discipline is “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb 12:9-11).

1. We are to continually *recognize* God's holiness by means of our obedience. Conversely, disobedience is a disregard for God's holiness. Submission to God's discipline is joined to our child-like trust in our Father's infinite wisdom in training and correcting us.
2. Our text warns of the great danger in refusing to submit to His discipline (Heb 12:12-17). A refusal to submit to discipline can expose us to more severe forms of chastening. Turning away from God begins with

devaluing His promises and ignoring His demands. The Christian is commanded to patiently learn while under the Father's rod of discipline.

3. There is a great temptation to become sullen under the Father's discipline and to turn to illicit sensuality for 'comfort'. However, our text warns that stubborn insistence on self-gratification can be a sign of spiritual 'drift' (Heb 2:1), and even falling away from the Lord in apostasy (Heb 12:16-17).

C. The Christian life is a life of ongoing repentance.

According to 1 Corinthians 11:28-32, when we "judge" ourselves by biblical self-confrontation we are practicing repentance (1 Cor 11:31). In other words, by *judging ourselves* we are identifying sinful patterns and attitudes in our lives we must confess, and from which we must turn away. In our ongoing repentance, sinful behaviors are mortified or 'put to death'—(Rom 8:12-13). When we *mortify* sin, we are starving and forsaking sin by ceasing to make a provision for it (Rom 13:14).

1. Ongoing repentance entails "course corrections" in which each area of the believer's life is brought back under God's rule and control. These course corrections occur when as we daily reflect on the character of God by faith in Christ and the gospel. When we 'navigate' spiritually in this manner, a life of dedication and separation unto God issues from our faith. Calvin states that definitive sanctification, or positional sanctification, is worked out daily in life by repentance born of faith. Ongoing repentance consists of countless 'course corrections' in our Christian walk. We'll have to preach innumerable sermons to ourselves.
2. In summary we would stress that as we keep preaching the gospel to ourselves, our hope grows and we become more convinced and assured that God will accomplish all of His loving purposes for us (Heb 6:10-12). Perhaps you have had conversations with believers who have said, "I am not looking for rewards, I'll be happy to just squeak into heaven, just to make it in." This is an ill-advised sentiment because it often is symptomatic of tolerating a weak hope.

3. Only a vigorous lively animating hope can move us to holy living now. And this hope comes from deepening our grasp of God's loving purposes for us in Christ. The future—God's 'end goal' is meant to shape, form, and condition all of our goals and values in the present. "*And everyone who has this hope fixed upon Him purifies himself just as He is pure*" (1 Jn 3:3).

End Notes:

ⁱ David Peterson, *Possessed by God*, pp. 69-92

ⁱⁱ Dr. Peter Jones on, "the work of Christ in forming a people and a kingdom"

ⁱⁱⁱ Peter Jensen, *At the Heart of the Universe*, pp. 32, 36-37

^{iv} William Wilberforce, *Authentic Christianity*

^v Jensen, pp. 19-21

^{vi} Tom Wells, *Come Home Forever*

^{vii} Peterson, p. 73

^{viii} *Ibid*, p. 75